

## Call for papers – Special Issue

### The origin, robustness and future of responsible innovation

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Has innovation fallen out of fashion? Until recently unanimously considered as both a key indicator of performance for organisations and main driver of wealth creation for our societies, innovation appears to be increasingly seen under a far less positive light. Whether in relation to decrease in job security and quality – e.g the cases of Uber and the FoodTech (Coyle, 2017), mental health – e.g. dysmorphic syndromes, electronic device addiction (Fox & Moreland, 2015; Senín-Calderón et al., 2020), overconsumption (Brooks, 2019), climate change (Touzard & Boutillier, 2017), the adverse consequences – whether intended or not – of an increasing quantity of innovation have been put forward. Overall, the very relationship between innovation and well-being has now been called into question (Brulé & Munier, 2021).

Such controversies have provided ground for a burgeoning academic literature investigating the “dark side” of innovation (Coad et al., 2021), in particular in relation to issues of ethics and responsibility. Although there is clear link between these questions and the issues (and related literature) of Corporate Social Responsibility, the very concept of ‘responsible innovation’, while previously discussed, still remains unclear. While there is an obvious relationship between responsible innovation and CSR, the two do not necessarily correspond. For instance, how is innovation envisaged within a responsible enterprise? More broadly, how do responsible organisations - of various kinds - address the issue of innovation? Could we (or should we) force upon innovating firms/organizations to be entirely responsible for the consequences of their innovations? In the context of emergence and high uncertainty that characterises innovation, where do we draw the line between what the innovating firm should be held responsible for and what it should not? Indeed, it is clear a high degree of responsibility (and liability) could simply hinder innovation. In fact, could responsible innovation not lead to delay by years innovation that would have critical benefits to humanity? Is there not an actual paradox in wanting innovation that is both responsible and impactful? In this respect, considering the ongoing pandemic crisis, how many more years would it have taken for COVID vaccines to be commercialised if pharmaceutical companies had not been able to negotiate with states legal

exemptions of civil liability (as in the UK<sup>1</sup> and in the U.S.<sup>2</sup>), as well as agreements sparing them from potential humongous payouts in case the new vaccines injected to billions of people were to have dire side effects<sup>3</sup>?

Whereas CSR typically relates to questions of governance within firms, the issue of responsible innovation reaches far wider as it affects society as a whole, as well as the very manner we envisage our future. This issue relates not only to the choices of innovation that are made, but also to the aims and objectives of those carrying out innovation, e.g. entrepreneurs. Facebook provides a clear example of the dual nature of this issue. Originally meant for classmates and friends to keep in touch – a commendable objective, it has as it reached a massive user base of several billion people been at the centre of scandals and controversies ranging from the exploitation and commercialisation of private data to the manipulation of national election votes (Craker & March, 2016). Likewise, the gap between Google’s original motto – “don’t be evil” – and some of the companies’ current practices, has been widely acknowledged. But such issues of inconsistencies related to what is a responsible innovation reach actually further. For instance, innovations related to establishing second-hand and reuse market, originally meant to reduce waste and consume in a more responsible way (Brooks, 2019), can instead create further waste by encouraging over-consumption (and manufacturing) of products, through the promise of a second life.

All those cases show that the matter of responsible innovation relates at the same time to the issues of the use of a particular innovation, the intent with which innovation was carried out in the first place, as well as the temporal incoherencies that may arise. How can and should companies foresee whether their innovation will be used for good or bad? What are the particular criteria that make an innovation responsible? Is there an actual way to innovate responsibly? The answers to such questions are heavy of consequences not only for companies that carry out innovation, but also to governments who need to define the playing field for the firms to innovate.

### **Aims and objectives**

In this context, the objective of this special issue is to foster academic thinking and discussion related to the concept of responsible innovation, i.e. explore the relationship between innovation and responsibility. Theoretical, conceptual and empirical (whether quantitative or qualitative) contributions exploring this relationship, as well as the issues mentioned above, are most welcome, in particular the ones involving interdisciplinary work and providing an original perspective on those questions. Although recent literature has been prone to examine more responsible ways to carry out innovation – e.g. sustainable innovation, social innovation, frugal innovation – the critical issue of what constitutes a reasonable innovation has so far received relatively less attention. Consequently, contributions enabling to identify avenues for further research and opening the discussion (as opposed to providing definite, but often narrow answers to those questions) are of high interest. Indeed, the aim of this special issue is to refrain from oversimplification, but instead to emphasise the complexity of the issues raised by the very concept of responsible innovation.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/distributing-vaccines-and-treatments-for-covid-19-and-flu/consultation-document-changes-to-human-medicine-regulations-to-support-the-rollout-of-covid-19-vaccines>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.phe.gov/emergency/events/COVID19/COVIDVaccinators/Pages/PREP-Act-Immunity-from-Liability-for-COVID-19-Vaccinators.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2021/01/25/vaccins-contre-le-covid-les-laboratoires-sont-ils-exemptes-de-leur-responsabilite-financiere-en-cas-d-effets-indesirables\\_6067539\\_4355770.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2021/01/25/vaccins-contre-le-covid-les-laboratoires-sont-ils-exemptes-de-leur-responsabilite-financiere-en-cas-d-effets-indesirables_6067539_4355770.html)

Amongst the topic of interest envisaged for this special issue (but not exclusively) are:

- **Theoretical approaches to responsible innovation.** What does it mean for an innovator to behave responsibly? Are innovation and responsibility even compatible with one another? What is the relationship between responsible innovation, sustainable innovation, social innovation, frugal innovation...? What is the relationship between responsible innovation and CSR? Going beyond technological innovation, what does responsible innovation mean in the cases of service innovation, design, business model innovation? Who are or should be the key proponents of responsible innovation: entrepreneurs, companies, universities,..., and which role should each play? What are the defining features of responsible innovation? What are the limits and limitations of responsible innovation as a concept? What are the most adequate theoretical lenses to address the issue of responsible innovation?
- **Responsible innovation and governance.** How can firm devise and implement responsible innovation strategies? What are the good practices of responsible innovation (e.g. transparency, co-creation, stakeholder involvement, innovation timeline)? Exploration-exploitation dilemma: can responsible innovation lead to radical and disruptive innovation? Could responsible innovation lead to an incremental innovation trap? Is it actually possible to foster innovations that are both responsible and impactful? What are the links between responsible innovation and open innovation? What are the consequences of responsible innovation on HR management, innovators' reward, etc.?
- **Responsible innovation and regulation.** What are the implications of responsible innovation in regard to regulation and policy<sup>4</sup>? Should regulators set rules and norms related to responsible innovation? To which extent should innovators be liable for consequences of their innovation? What would be the adequate amount of time to assess the responsibility of an innovator? How should responsible innovation affect innovation policies? What are the consequences of responsible innovation for intellectual property regimes? Should certain types of innovation be barred from patent application or from public subsidies if they are deemed not responsible enough? What are the implications for public research and academic freedom? How can one assess the responsibility of fundamental research?
- **Challenges and perspectives of responsible innovation.** Responsible innovation and globalisation – can responsible innovation prevail without global worldwide regulation? Is responsible innovation compatible with sustained economic growth? To which extent responsible innovation can help address grand challenges and forthcoming social and environmental challenges? What are the relationship between responsible innovation and emerging technologies, such as A.I., biotechnologies, blockchain, nanotechnologies...?

## References

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<sup>4</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/h2020-section/responsible-research-innovation>

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### **Timetable for submission and acceptance of papers:**

- **June 30, 2022:** Deadline for complete manuscripts through online paper submission: <https://jiem.manuscriptmanager.net>

Guideline for authors: <http://innovations.cairn.info/en/instructions-for-authors/>

- **October 2022:** Expected return from the first round of evaluation.
- **Early 2023:** Submission of modified versions.
- **End of 2023:** Planned publication of the special issue.

A special session on responsible innovation will be organized during the Innovation Forum in Bruges (May 5 and 6, 2022): <https://rri.univ-littoral.fr/forum-innovation-2022/> . Authors who wish to participate in this special session must send a communication proposal (title and abstract of approximately 500 words) to Valentine Georget ([valentine.georget@polytechnique.edu](mailto:valentine.georget@polytechnique.edu) ) before February 28, 2022.

Submit questions to: Valentine Georget, [valentine.georget@polytechnique.edu](mailto:valentine.georget@polytechnique.edu) .